SocietySTAR

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Spring 2015

MHS Receives Surprise for Its 150th Birthday

It was a surprise gift that amazed and thrilled the Montana Historical Society staff.

This year is the 150th anniversary of MHS that was created in 1865 by the Montana Territorial Legislature making it the oldest such state institution in the West.

In a plain brown envelope with no return address was the original signed Act that created the Montana Historical Society on Feb. 2, 1865, hand written and signed by Territorial Gov. Sidney Edgerton.

"It was one of the most exciting days of my career here at MHS," MHS Research Center Manager Molly Kruckenberg said. "To start your day with the return of a historic document to a place that can preserve it for future generations is amazing. To have it be our founding document is incredible."

There was a postage due stamp on the envelope and no return address. Inside with the document was a simple hand-written note that read "I think you may have an interest in the attached," a copy of the Billings Gazette's recent editorial on the need for the proposed Montana Heritage Center as the new home for MHS, and a couple of photocopies of other documents about the creation of MHS.

Because the document is so rare, MHS archivists compared it to other acts in the MHS collection from the 1865 Legislature. They compared the paper, hand-writing, fasteners, and various other features of the document and determined it to be authentic, Kruckenberg said. The actual bill creating MHS obviously has not been in the collection before now.

Kruckenberg said that without intensive scientific testing MHS can't be 100 percent sure it is authentic, but she is 99 percent sure



MHS Director Bruce Whittenberg and MHS Research Center Manager Molly Kruckenberg hold the original bill creating MHS 150 years ago.

it is. "There really is no doubt in my mind," she said.

MHS Director Bruce Whittenberg said, "the unexpected arrival of this document on our doorstep is remarkable." It is one of the few original signed bills with Edgerton's signature in the collection.

"We are so appreciative that our unknown benefactor cared for this historic document so well and saw the importance of delivering it to

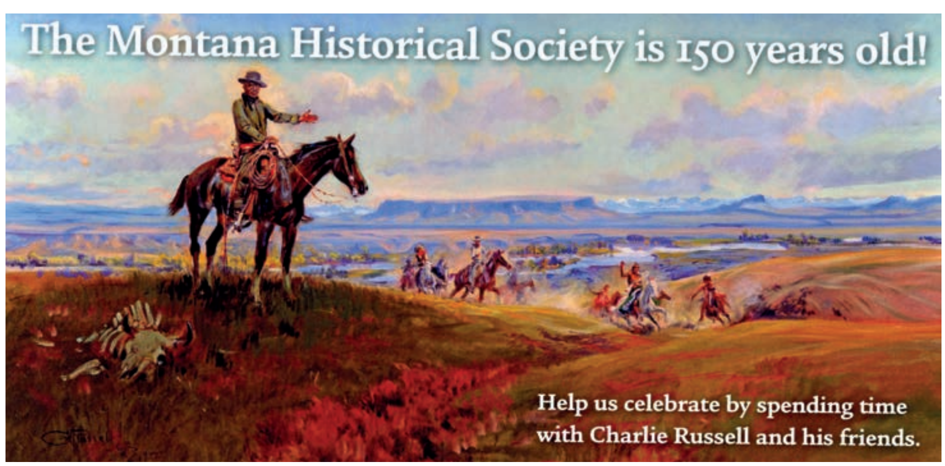
Gift *(cont. on p. 4)*

Russell Symposium Highlights Summer

As a special part of the year-long celebration of the Montana Historical Society's 150th Anniversary, a host of scholars and experts will present "Montana's Charlie Russell: 21st Century Perspectives on the Cowboy Artist" June 18th through the 20th in Helena.

"I hope that people realize what an incredible opportunity this is to learn about Russell and his legacy," MHS Outreach and Interpretation Manager Kirby Lambert said. "We

Symposium *(cont. on p. 4)*



DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Montana's Museums Are a Family Affair

BY BRUCE WHITTENBERG

Recently, I had the privilege of attending the Museums Association of Montana (MAM) annual conference in Billings. MAM represents approximately 150 of Montana's museums, historic houses and heritage centers in every corner of the state and provides opportunities for education, collaboration and fellowship. I consider it a great privilege to be involved with these passionate folks. The ideas they share, and the enthusiasm they have for their communities and their heritage is infectious.

This "heritage industry" that we're all part of demands very special people. Most of these institutions are in constant fund-raising mode while thinking about their next exhibit, building relationships with patrons, donors, board members and visitors, and celebrating the history of their area. The museums across Montana are treasures. Visitors are usually surprised and amazed at the collections and exhibits they find in them. Each is built on passion, research, generosity, and countless hours of volunteer service. The Montana Historical Society strives to be a helpful friend and colleague to all of them. In 2013 we produced "The Montana Heritage Tour," a video series broadcast statewide highlighting some of the great museums from Chinook to Dillon, from Libby to Red Lodge. We are proud to support MAM with administration and leadership. Deb Mitchell, in our MHS Outreach and Interpretation program, also serves as its executive director. We often loan from our collection, and borrow from theirs. We provide expertise and guidance, and we learn from our friends. We offer public programs, and enjoy attending theirs. It's a wonderful community and an important part of Montana's economy. At the Montana Historical Society, we see it as part of our mission to support our friends, partners and colleagues around the state, direct visitors to their museums and attractions and support their work - just as they support us.

I get to travel the state enjoying these great places, and I get to call it WORK! In Montana, we are blessed with scenic beauty, extraordinary recreation, two spectacular national parks, interesting communities and warm and welcoming people. We also are blessed with nearly 200 museums and heritage attractions, that are a source of pride to us all. Stop in and explore your local museum and attend its programs. Make a donation. Don't forget to tell our friends, partners and colleagues "Thank you!" ✪

About Us

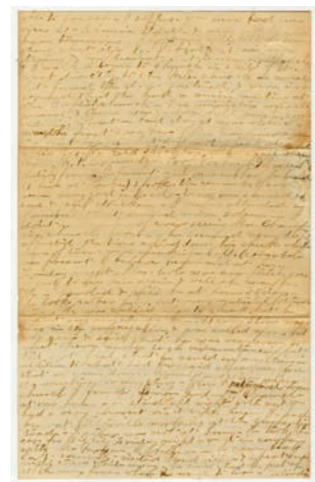
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- MHS Director: Bruce Whittenberg
- Membership Coordinator: Rebecca Baumann (406) 444-2918
- Editor: Tom Cook (406) 444-1645

www.montanahistoricalsociety.org

SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING OLD

Civil War Letter Completes a Journey to Montana



Written more than 150 years ago this letter completes a circle of the Montana Civil War story in the MHS Research Center.

As the nation commemorates the 100th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, a letter written just after it ended and just acquired by MHS completes a story of a woman who came to Montana in its wake.

The Research Center was contacted by an appraiser about a collection that didn't appear to be related to Montana history. "It contained a single item that he believed we would be interested in – and boy, were we!" MHS and State Archivist Jodie Foley said.

It was a letter written by Nellie Gordon of Cuba, N.Y., to her brother who was serving in the Union Army. She wrote it just after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln and talked movingly about the sadness she and her New York community were experiencing.

"So what is the tie to Montana? Just a few months after the letter was written, Nellie, now wife of William Fletcher, moved to Summit City, Montana Territory," Foley said.

MHS already had letters and other items in its collection detailing the newlyweds trip to Montana and life in its early mining camps. "Letters by William, who served as U.S. Marshal in Montana Territory, also discuss his service in the Civil War and the challenges of Montana Territorial law enforcement," Foley said.

The letter "completes a circle" showing how those coming to Montana brought with them the life changing experiences the Civil War forced upon them, Foley said. ✪

ON THE ROAD TO MONTANA'S GREAT MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Cooke City Montana Museum Shows Community Pride

The Cooke City Montana Museum is along one of the most beautiful roads associated with Yellowstone Park, and the history it celebrates is an important part of Montana's story.

Museum Director Kelly Hartman grew up in the area before going off to get her degree in art at Western Oregon University.

"I took a lot of art history, but not much about history in general especially of this area and the mining history that occurred here," she said.

The museum that opened a year ago tells the story of the Cooke City, Silver Gate and Colter Pass area. Hartman took over the museum two years ago when Dee Smith, who laid the ground work for it, passed away.

The new museum includes exhibits about the Beartooth Highway, mining, and a variety of themes on the community's history.

Hartman says the MHS Montana History Conference and Museums Association of Montana programs and workshops helped her learn on the job how to run a museum. "They were hugely important in teaching me things I needed to know," she said.

In return, Hartman was a speaker at the recent MAM meeting in Billings where she drew rave reviews. "She did a great job and was truly inspirational," MHS Development Officer Susan Near said. "Kelly is a bedrock of local history, which after all, is Montana History."

Hartman said the new museum has brought many benefits to the community. "It has been a big thing," she said. "It is bringing people together and has been important for tourism."

When you take the beautiful Beartooth Highway, stop in at the Cooke City Museum and learn how important Montana history is to all of us. ✪



Cooke City Museum Director Kelly Hartman in front of the new museum.

SOCIETY STAR PROFILE

Kendra Gensch Reminds Us of What History is All About

Historical research for many young people at best means a quick Google on the iPhone.

Kendra Gensch reminds us that some young people still find excitement in doing primary source research to unlock the wonders of Montana's history on their own.

The senior at Helena High School first came to the MHS last year as a student in Will Wright's American History Class. "This was an amazing place," she said.

She joined the Friends of the Montana Historical Society and volunteered for the Montana History Calendar Project. It involved organizing, fact checking and researching a file collection of events arranged by day in Montana history.

"I was a little nervous because I had literally not done anything related to it before, but I said I want to give it a try," Gensch said.

MHS Research Historian Zoe Ann Stoltz said Gensch didn't seem to have the experience to do the job. "I was a little leery because research is not the easiest thing to do here at MHS," Stoltz said. "But she was very enthusiastic, and I decided to give her a shot."

Gensch hit the ground running. "The first time I saw original things from the 1860s, I just wanted to keep going," she said.

Stoltz was amazed at her work. "Kendra honestly has intuition when it comes to doing research," she said.

Gensch plans on going to the University of Montana where she can pursue another of her interests. "I think I will play rugby. I'm going to take exploratory studies, but I think Zoe might hurt me if I don't take some history." ✪

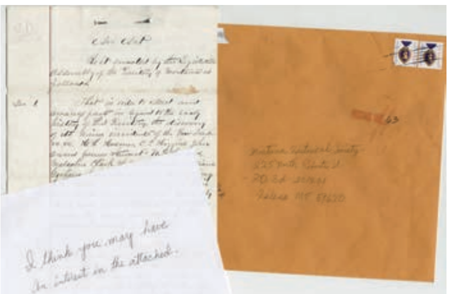


Kendra Gensch and MHS Research Historian Zoe Ann Stoltz sharing the excitement of the hunt for history.

Gift *(cont. from p. 1)*

the Montana Historical Society," he said.

MHS hopes that the person who sent the historic bill will come forward so that more information can be gathered, Kruckenberg said . "We thank them anyway," she said. "This is a piece of history that is important to both MHS and to the people of Montana."



The original bill creating MHS came with postage due.

Symposium *(cont. from p. 1)*

have the most highly regarded Russell scholars coming, literally from all over North America, and it will be truly amazing having them all together at one symposium to share their knowledge about and love of Russell."

Speakers Include: Author and retired professor Brian Dippie, Charles M. Russell Center Director Byron Price, Amon Carter Museum Conservator Jodie Utter, Denver art historian Joan Carpenter Troccoli, and Author Larry Peterson.

"The Montana Historical Society holds one of the largest and most significant collections of Russell artwork in the world," Lambert said. "I can think of no better way to celebrate our 150th birthday than by focusing on Russell's legacy and the continuing value it holds for Montanans and the non-Montanans who love the West."

The cost for the entire three-day package is $95. You can see a full schedule and individual event prices and register on line at *www.montanhistoricalsociety.org.*

Black History Project Going Statewide

The National Park Service recently granted more than $27,000 to the Montana Historical Society's State Historic Preservation Office to identify and document historic places associated with the African American experience throughout the state.

The "Identifying African American Heritage Places" project builds from a previous statewide project that identified resources at MHS associated with black heritage. Using census information, city directories, and historic maps, historians will research many properties where African American residents lived and worked in Montana during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Researchers will focus on Helena, where approximately 40 residences, businesses, and black social centers will be identified and documented. Additional properties will be recognized in sixteen communities statewide, from Miles City to Missoula, and from Hardin to Havre.

The project includes plans to nominate at least one property to the National Register of Historic Places, and to upgrade the MHS's African American History webpage.

"Scholars have barely scratched the surface in identifying places that convey the rich heritage of the black community," project historian Kate Hampton said. "We are thrilled and so grateful to the National Park Service for their support, whereby scholars, families, and the public will gain a tangible link to this important aspect of our history."

"Identifying Montana's African American Heritage Places" is one of only thirteen matching grants funded by the National Park Service's Underrepresented Communities grant program in 2014.

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell said "Our American heritage is a tapestry made up of threads from many nations and communities, and we are working with public and private partners to help ensure that our National Register of Historic Places reflects this remarkable diversity. These matching grants will enable us to ... more fully tell the story of our country.".



The original building of Walter Dorsey's grocery store in Helena is part of the new historic preservation study. His two daughters are in the doorway.

No Matter Where You Are MHS Is Just a Click Away

No matter where you are dozens of Montana Historical Society programs, hundreds of historical photos and stories, instant research opportunities, interaction with staff and much more are just a click away through the power of social media.

"In the last few years, we've been able to connect more and more people to history. People in every corner of the state and beyond," Christy Eckerle, head of the MHS Social Media Committee, said. "People anywhere in the world can watch our programs on YouTube, or see historic photos that we post to Facebook. Social media allows us to share our collections and expertise with others like never before."

The MHS web site at *www.montanahistoricalsociety.org* now includes Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram and Soundcloud. There are also blog sites maintained by MHS staff.

Here is a brief look at what each of the sites offers:

- **Facebook** – In a nutshell this is the "hot gossip" place to go. You can find out what is going on and coming up at MHS. It is also a chance to go behind the scenes at MHS to see what is happening in the collections, historic photographs, and what the staff is up to in planning and working for you.
- **Twitter** – This is a place to get quick information on what is happening at MHS and to let the staff and other followers know what you think about it.
- **YouTube** – This is your gateway to streaming video of MHS programs and other events when you weren't able to catch them live. There are currently about 100 programs and events posted for your enjoyment. Other uses are being developed including having staff show and talk about their favorite things in the MHS collection.
- **Pinterest** – This is a site for people who want to see an object or photograph that grabs their attention visually. It is a gateway to learn more about the object or photograph.
- **Instagram** – This is another quick image site that provides a variety of things that generally speak for themselves, including historic photographs.
- **Soundcloud** – This site allows you to hear programs and can be used while in a car or while you are doing something that doesn't allow you to sit and watch. The site also has dozens of short "History on the Go" stories about Montana recorded for AM radio use by MHS Research Historian Ellen Baumler. Other uses are being explored like audio of actual oral history interviews in the MHS collection.



Circled in red on this image of the MHS homepage are the icons that put Montana history at your fingertips.

Eckerle said in addition to reaching out to people across the state and nation to tell the Montana story, there are two main goals behind MHS social media.

"The first is to educate people about all the things we do here at the Society. We are much more than a museum," she said. "The other is to make us seem less intimidating to people. Some people think that museums and history are cold and impersonal. We want to be approachable to all people and to let them know they can talk to us and interact with us in person or on our website."

MHS staff has built the social media program from the ground up in addition to their regular jobs without a paid social media coordinator. Eckerle's real job is associate editor in the MHS Publications program.

"The thing that holds us back from doing even more is staff time," she said. "We have to balance social media with all the other things that all of us do that are traditional MHS responsibilities. It really is a labor of love." ✪

New Chinese Exhibit Beautiful Reason to Visit MHS This Summer

There is power, determined dignity and stunning beauty in the new MHS exhibit "Our Forgotten Pioneers: The Chinese in Montana."

It is a great reason to visit Montana's Museum in Helena this summer.

The exhibit has been in development for more than four years. It includes textiles, ceramics, cultural treasures including a 10-foot hand written banner from what was called the Chinese Masonic Temple in Virginia City. Also a noodle making machine from the Mai Wah Noodle Parlor in Butte and a magnificent altar from the Chinese Temple in Helena.

MHS Museum Registrar Rowena Harrington and MHS Interpretive Historian Ellen Baumler are co-curators for the exhibit and set out to tell a little known chapter of Montana's past. "I have been so impressed by the tenacity and resilience of these men so far from home," Harrington said. "They never gave up."

Chinese once comprised 10 percent of the Montana population and was predominately male, although some Chinese women did join their husbands. "In the face of harsh laws and appalling discrimination, these energetic men mined claims, laid the tracks of the Northern Pacific, built businesses, and paid taxes," Baumler said. "Yet very little remains to recall their presence in Montana."

Behind the scenes MHS Exhibit Designer Roberta Jones-Wallace and Preparator Todd Saarinen created an extraordinary venue for displaying more than 250 artifacts and objects. Intriguing inter-actives for people of all ages developed by MHS Outreach and Interpretation Program Specialist Deb Mitchell add fun to the exhibit. The exhibit opened May 14.



Conservators at work on the Chinese alter that will be a beautiful focal point in the new MHS exhibit.

MHS thanks the World Museum of Mining, the Montana Heritage Commission, the Mai Wah Society and other individuals for loaning objects for the exhibit. Kudos also to Yueh Chang of Helena and David Lang of Rowland Heights, Calif., who helped with translations.

MHS Loses a Loyal Friend With the Death of Gov. Tim Babcock

In one of his last public events as a speaker for the Montana Historical Society's celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Centennial Train last year, a frail Gov. Tim Babcock brought tears to the eyes of the audience as he talked about his love for Montana and its people.

Montana's 16th governor died on April 6, 2015, at the age of 95 after a long and active life during which he played a major role in Montana and national politics rubbing shoulders with such giants as President Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon. Yet he never lost his roots as the boy from Crackerbox Creek in Dawson County where his first home was a tarpaper shack.

Babcock and his wife Betty, who died in 2013, were both honored by lying in state in the Capitol Rotunda. Ironically, the last governor before Babcock to lie in state in the Rotunda was Gov. Donald Nutter.

Nutter and Babcock were the first to run as a team for governor and Lt. governor on the same ticket in 1960. Babcock was suddenly thrust into the governorship in 1962 after Nutter was killed in a plane crash. Babcock then won re-election on his own serving as governor from 1962 to 1969.

Tim and Betty were great friends of the Montana Historical Society and worked on many projects over the years.

Veteran Montana broadcaster Norma Ashby was a longtime friend of the Babcocks. "In my opinion no Montana governor or first lady did more for our state after they left office as Tim and Betty did," she said.

Ashby was on the Centennial Train with the Babcocks in 1964 and moderated the reunion event last year. You can watch the event on the MHS YouTube site: *www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nyTykAEhXY*



Tim Babcock

Get Involved in Montana History

BY SUSAN NEAR, MHS DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

This year as the Montana Historical Society celebrates its 150th anniversary we look to our past and just as important–we look forward. MHS is embracing new methods and technologies that can help us better preserve, manage, and share Montana's heritage resources.

Recent and upcoming projects at MHS reflect some of the ways we strive to make Montana's history more accessible. For example, we just completed an updated index for articles in "Montana, The Magazine of Western History" you can now search magazine volumes through 2012 right on our website: *www://svcalt.mt.gov/his/magazine/Reference Index.asp!* Museum staff is working on a website component for their collections database, which will provide access to more images and information on the museum's art & artifacts. Additional digitized MHS archival records and historic photographs are being added to the resources found on the Montana Memory Project: *www://mtmemory.org*; a statewide initiative between MHS and the Montana State Library. A growing number of educators receive weekly e-mails from MHS that highlight and share resources on teaching Montana history; a companion site archives all resources, see: www://*teachingmontanahistory.blogspot.com/*. More information will appear on the MHS African-Americans in Montana–Heritage Resources webpage at: *www://svcalt.mt.gov/research/AfricanAmerican/AfricanAmericanInMT.asp* when our State Historic Preservation Office completes a new project to document associated historic sites in the state.

During this important anniversary, you can help the Montana Historical Society celebrate in many ways. A donation to MHS will help enrich MHS projects like those above. You can also tell your friends, family and colleagues of the great things happening for the future of Montana history. Attend upcoming MHS programs & events, sleuth into your past, read an article in our magazine, browse the MHS website, or visit a Montana museum or historic site. History happens every day - be a part of it! ✪

MHS Russell Book Honored

The Montana Historical Society Press' new book, "Montana's Charlie Russell: Art in the Collection of the Montana Historical Society," has won the prestigious 2015 Western Heritage Award for Best Art Book.

"*Montana's Charlie Russell*" includes all of the paintings, sculptures, drawings, illustrated letters and Russell artifacts in the MHS collection

Donald Reeves, McCasland Chair of Cowboy Culture at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, said the MHS book was one of "a significant number of entries this year."

The Western Heritage Awards have been in existence for 54 years. "Your participation in preserving the Western Heritage is vital to future generations," Donald Reeves said in announcing the award.

The book was written by MHS staffers Jennifer Bottomly-O'looney and Kirby Lambert and has been a dream of many for more than 60 years.

"We are pleased that the Society's world-class collection of Charlie's art is receiving the recognition that it has so long deserved," Lambert said. ✪

First Door on the Left

BY REBECCA BAUMANN, MHS MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

February 2, 2015 marked the official 150th anniversary of the Montana Historical Society. It was great to see so many of you at the event held that day at the Capitol. Remember, we will have more chances to celebrate this MHS milestone all year long. It is also a fitting time to embrace the future of our organization and continue to work toward development of the new Montana Heritage Center and all the remarkable opportunities this will afford our members and the public.

As we continue to celebrate our magnificent milestone and work toward this major project, please know that you are important to us. We are here to help you locate information and resources, answer questions, educate and fascinate, and continue to publish and deliver an award-winning magazine, as well as publications & books on fascinating real stories from our past.

Montana history is fun, remarkable, entertaining, and educational. And it's all here for you to explore! Feel free to call, e-mail, write, or stop and sign up your favorite person with a membership. As always, I can be reached at (406) 444-2918, rbaumann@mt.gov. Stop by if you get a chance I always enjoy talking with our members! ✪

Big Sky. Big Land. Big History.
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225 N. Roberts, P.O. Box 201201
Helena, MT 59620-1201

Inside

We are thankful for our members!



John Clarke (1881-1970) could neither hear nor speak yet his artistic abilities left a powerful and articulate vision of Montana. This summer Montana's Museum presents "Eloquence in Wood" an exhibit that brings together an incredible collection of his work. It features sculptures, paintings, drawings and letter from the MHS collection, as well as others on loan from the Glacier County Historical Society Museum, private collections, and furniture and tools on loan that were in his East Glacier Studio. A member of the Blackfeet Nation, Clarke was an avid outdoorsman who transformed his experiences observing wildlife, hunting and fishing into lively sculptures and playful sketches. It is a great example of how MHS works with other museums and private collectors to bring exciting exhibits to you.